Coming Together Around Military Families®

Duty To Care I: Supporting Young Children through Challenging Times

Colleen Lagasse, LCSW
Military Projects @ ZERO TO THR

Early Experiences Matter

We are all a product of our earliest experiences.

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Mission and Vision

To promote the health and development of infants and toddlers.

We envision a society with the knowledge and the will to support all infants and toddlers in reaching their full potential.

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Andrea Booher

Debbie Rappaport

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How We Achieve Our Mission

By translating research and knowledge into a range of practical tools and resources for use by the adults who influence the lives of young children.

Debbie Rappaport

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What ZERO TO THREE Does

We are a national, nonprofit organization that informs, trains and supports professionals, policymakers and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of infants and toddlers.

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Military Families

90,000 babies are born to active duty Service members each year

481,000 children from birth to 3 years old in National Guard families

83,233 single parents on active duty and 79,264 in the National Guard and Reserve

40,000 active duty and 11,000 National Guard and Reserve dual military pa

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Department of Defense

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Coming Together Around Military Families

Strengthening the resilience of young children and their families who are experiencing trauma, grief and loss as a result of a Service member's deployment to Iraq and/or Afghanistan.

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CTAMF Project Goals

1. Parent Resources: materials available about the implications of deployment, trauma, grief and loss on young children, and ways parents can support resilience in their children.

2. Focus on Youngest of Children: awareness raising across military and civilian communities to more effectively serve young children and their families.

3. Professional Training: offer support across four areas of practice—child care, mental health, family support, and health care— on the young child's experience with the spectrum of trauma, grief and loss

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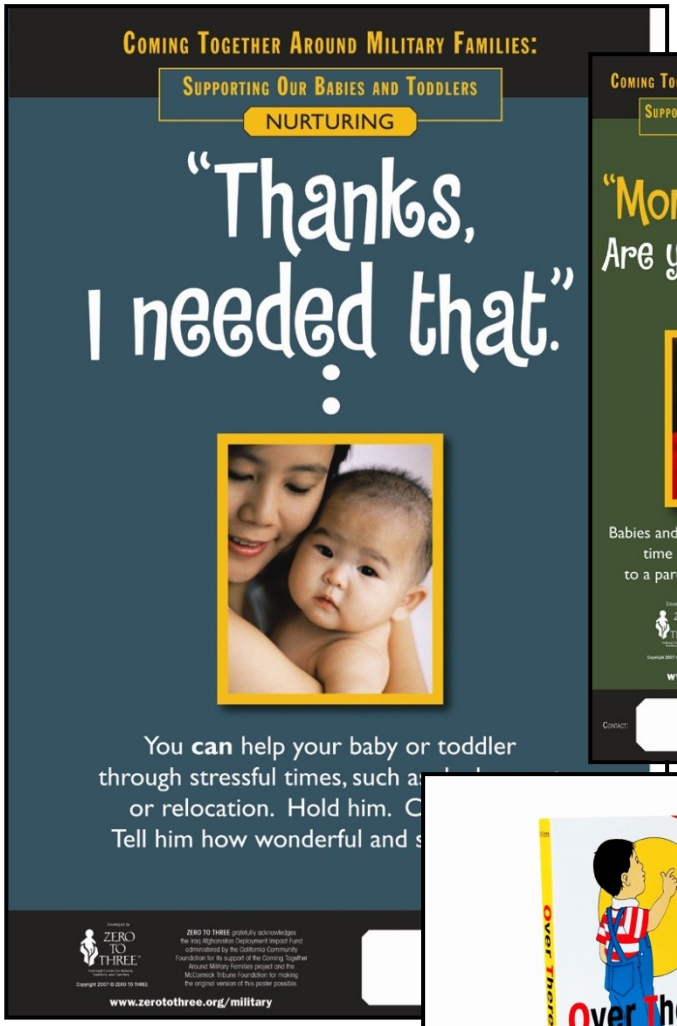
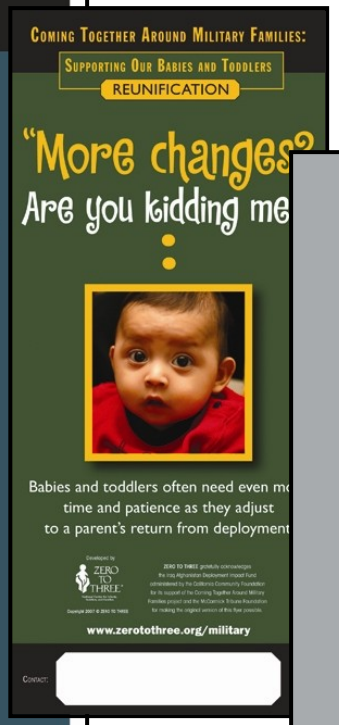
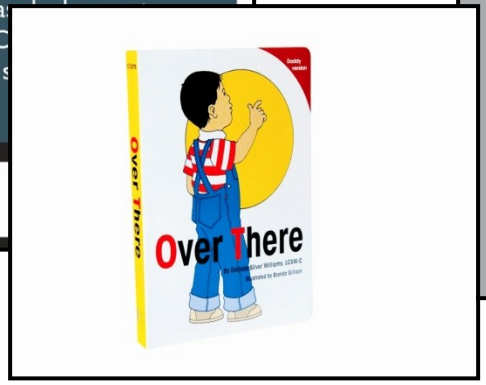
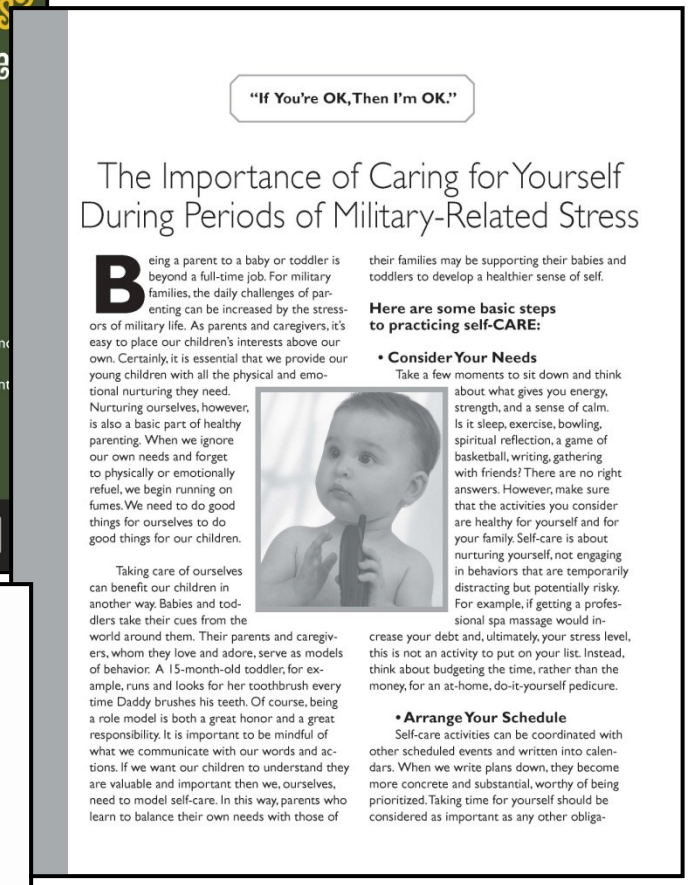
Coming Together Around Military Families (CTAMF)


Coming Together Around Military Families:
Supporting Our Babies and Toddlers
NURTURING
"Thanks, I needed that."
You can help your baby or toddler through stressful times, such as
or relocation. Hold him. C
Tell him how wonderful and s
www.zerotothree.org/military


Coming Together Around Military Families:
Supporting Our Babies and Toddlers
REUNIFICATION
"More changes?
Are you kidding me
Babies and toddlers often need even m
time and patience as they adjust
to a parent's return from deployment
www.zerotothree.org/military





"If You're OK, Then I'm OK."

The Importance of Caring for Yourself During Periods of Military-Related Stress

Being a parent to a baby or toddler is beyond a full-time job. For military families, the daily challenges of parenting can be increased by the stressors of military life. As parents and caregivers, it's easy to place our children's interests above our own. Certainly, it is essential that we provide our young children with all the physical and emotional nurturing they need. Nurturing ourselves, however, is also a basic part of healthy parenting. When we ignore our own needs and forget to physically or emotionally refuel, we begin running on fumes. We need to do good things for ourselves to do good things for our children.

Taking care of ourselves can benefit our children in another way. Babies and toddlers take their cues from the world around them. Their parents and caregivers, whom they love and adore, serve as models of behavior. A 15-month-old toddler, for example, runs and looks for her toothbrush every time Daddy brushes his teeth. Of course, being a role model is both a great honor and a great responsibility. It is important to be mindful of what we communicate with our words and actions. If we want our children to understand they are valuable and important then we, ourselves, need to model self-care. In this way, parents who learn to balance their own needs with those of their families may be supporting their babies and toddlers to develop a healthier sense of self.

Here are some basic steps to practicing self-CARE:

- **Consider Your Needs**

Take a few moments to sit down and think about what gives you energy, strength, and a sense of calm. Is it sleep, exercise, bowling, spiritual reflection, a game of basketball, writing, gathering with friends? There are no right answers. However, make sure that the activities you consider are healthy for yourself and for your family. Self-care is about nurturing yourself, not engaging in behaviors that are temporarily distracting but potentially risky. For example, if getting a professional spa massage would increase your debt and, ultimately, your stress level, this is not an activity to put on your list. Instead, think about budgeting the time, rather than the money, for an at-home, do-it-yourself pedicure.

- **Arrange Your Schedule**

Self-care activities can be coordinated with other scheduled events and written into calendars. When we write plans down, they become more concrete and substantial, worthy of being prioritized. Taking time for yourself should be considered as important as any other obliga-

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Our Goal for Infants and Toddlers?

ZERO TO THREE
National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

Helping them to thrive!

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Guiding Principles of Duty to Care Training

- **Infants and toddlers are affected by stress and trauma associated with deployments and homecomings**
  - Military life is often demanding
  - Has unique cultures that can vary by branch, installation, mission and family
  - Military families have historically been remarkably resilient
  - Today's circumstances can be extraordinarily difficult

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Important to remember…

In spite of extremely stressful circumstances, *most* of our military families continue to do well and maintain loving, nurturing environments for their infants and toddlers.

"I know that I can handle it, I know that I can do it, but it's *hard*." **- Military spouse and mother**

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A Continuum from Stress to Trauma

Normative, Developmentally Appropriate Stress

Emotionally Costly Stress

Traumatic Stress

Early Adversity and Trauma: Derailing Healthy Growth (1/26/07)
Presented by Alicia F. Lieberman, Ph.D., Irving B. Harris Professor of Infant Mental Health and Vice Chair for Academic Affairs, University of California San Francisco Dept. of Psychiatry
Director, Child Trauma Research Project at San Francisco General Hospital

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The Stress Response

- **We respond to a threat by focusing our energy and attention on that threat**
- **Forces us to turn our attention away from future needs such as growth and repair**
- **Called the “stress response”**

(Gunnar & Davis, 2008)

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Benefits of Secure Attachment

- **Securely attached infants may be less affected by stress; indeed, they often secrete less cortisol than insecurely attached infants when exposed to stressful situations with their mothers**

  (Nachmias, Gunnar, Mangelsdorf, Parritz, & Buss, 1996)

- **In fact, securely attached children often produce less cortisol and can stop the cortisol response more effectively than insecurely attached children.**

  (Shore, 1997)

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Be a Voice for the Babies

- **Give them the words to express their emotions – even if they can't yet say the words themselves.**
- **Encourage the important adults in their lives to understand *what* they (young children) might be experiencing and *how* they might be experiencing it.**

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A reminder

We must always be mindful that, in addition to what the event brings to the family, it is what the family brings to the event.

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Every family is unique and will write its own story

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Complicated deployments

- **Situations or events that *could* make a challenging situation even more challenging:**
  - Repeated deployments (potential "spiral" versus cycle of deployment)
  - Extended deployments

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Complicated Deployments (cont'd)

- Individual family circumstances
  - Relocation
  - Pregnancy and/or new baby
  - Caregiver depression
  - Special needs child

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Other Factors

- Individual family circumstances
  - History of family violence and/or child maltreatment
  - Isolation from family/friends
  - Perception of the military lifestyle and/or of the deployment
  - Anything that is perceived by the family as a chronic and/or significant stressor!

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- **How do you think complicated deployments might affect infants and toddlers and their core needs?**

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“Emotional problems such as depression, economic stress, and marital conflict can interfere with sensitive and responsive parenting, be disruptive of secure attachments (see Belsky and Isabella, 1988; Thompson, 1999b; Waters, 1978), and constitute a significant source of instability over time in attachment security.”

(National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000, p. 234)

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What's in Your Toolkit?

- **What kinds of strategies/techniques have you found to be helpful in supporting families experiencing complicated deployments? In fostering resilience?**

- **What kinds of resources (programs, services, ideas, collaborative opportunities) do you share?**

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Parental Injury

The parent is changed in some way or another

- temporary or permanent/chronic change
- changes in functioning and/or appearance
- short and/or long term implications

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Peeling back the layers

- **How does the parent perceive this injury in relation to their sense of self?**
- **How does the parent perceive this injury in relation to her role as a parent?**
  - How might the injury affect parent-child play/bonding/reconnecting?
- **How does this injury play out in the child's recognition of or overall reaction to her parent?**

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Peeling back the layers some more

- **Hospitalization involved?**
  - Where does the child stay during hospitalization?
    - With others?
    - Accompanies parent to hospital
      - Short term or long term?
    - What does the child experience in the hospital setting?
    - Where does the family stay during hospitalization?

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And more layers…

- **How does the child perceive the injury?**
  - How did he find out about the injury?
  - What was he told about the injury/what kind of language was used?
  - How does she experience the injury and what does it mean for her?

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Always Remember

It’s the family’s perception of the stressor…

NOT YOURS

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Visible Versus *Invisible* Injuries

- *For your consideration…*

- **Are there purely physical wounds?**
- **Are there purely emotional wounds?**
- **What does this mean for a family adjusting to the Service member's return?**
- **What does this mean for a young child adjusting to his or her parent's return?**

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Goals for supporting young children impacted by loss

- Creating a safe and consistent environment
- Supporting the connections between the child and the new or surviving caregiver
- Supporting the child in understanding the physical reality of the parent's death
- Supporting the child in achieving emotional regulation in response to traumatic reminders

(Lieberman et al., 2003)

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Goals for supporting young children impacted by loss

- **Fostering adjustment to changes in everyday living**
- **Supporting the child in developing problem solving and conflict resolution skills in relation to the loss**
- **Integrating the parent who died into the child's continuing sense of self**

(Lieberman et al., 2003)

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What's in Your Toolkit?

- **What kinds of strategies/techniques have you found to be helpful in supporting families who have experienced the death of their service member? In fostering resilience?**
- **What kinds of resources (programs, services, ideas, collaborative opportunities) can you share?**

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In defense of our country, in support of military families…

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DO

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Colleen Lagasse
Senior Training and Consultation Specialist
Military Projects @ ZERO TO THREE
clagasse@zerotothree.org / www.zerotothree.org
202.638-0411

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